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## THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN NEGRO

By GEORGE S. PAINTER

THE race problem has been long an aggravating one in the United States, and tends to become even more pronouncedly so. Ever since slavery was instituted among us its evil consequences have acted upon both the black and white races with ever deepening complications. We have abolished slavery as an institution and survived a civil war in so doing, but the perils of race hatred and antipathy remain with us and local race warfare threatens us now and again. In many parts of the South in particular, where the negroes are most numerous, the situation occasionally becomes one of grave social and political concern.

Although it is impossible ever to make with certainty any prophecy concerning the future in relation to human affairs, it is nevertheless always interesting to observe those great natural laws operative among men, calculate the goal towards which they move, and seek to discern in some measure if possible the "divinity that shapes our ends." In the evolution of the American negro several forces are working in an unique way which are of special interest to the anthropologist as well as to the sociologist. It is our purpose to examine briefly the more potent of these factors.

### I. ADAPTATION TO CIVILIZATION

It is a normal law of life that development should be gradual and contiguous. Wherever this law is violated, in any fundamental way, it is pretty sure to result in comparative degeneration of the species. The hothouse plant may bring more immediate and brilliant results, because of forced and abnormal conditions, but at the expense of hardiness and vitality. It is proverbially true that primitive peoples can not stand an enforced civilization. No better example of this can be cited than that of the American Indians, who, even on their own soil, have resisted civil conditions unto death.

Indeed they seem almost incapable of existence apart from their primitive, normal barbarism. Even where they have, in small numbers, settled to the arts of civilization, this is usually of such crude order and so much of their native habits and traditions are carried into it that they can at best be said to be only partially civilized. Many proud tribes have perished, one after another, before the march of civilization, and the remainder, at times, seem surely destined to ultimate extinction.

The abrupt uprooting and transplanting of the African negroes from their native soil and clime, with their barbarous habits of life, into a totally different environment in America, with the conditions of a highly developed civilization thrust upon them in the bonds of slavery, was an unique experiment in the history of mankind, certainly unparalleled in the elements that characterized it. So much the more, therefore, is it of special interest. It certainly did great violence to the gradual and contiguous development of the negro; it remains to be seen whether it has resulted in his degeneracy.

Many circumstances were evidently favorable to aid the negro in his adjustment to the new civil conditions. As to whether the climatic changes were favorable or unfavorable to him we are unable to say; there must at least have been a readjustment or acclimatization. But the negro, as a slave, had a peculiar advantage over the Indian, in that he fell at once under the tutelage and compelling hand of the master race, already highly schooled in civilization. Thus he was at once forced into a certain conformity with the fundamentals of a higher life and its allied habits were speedily acquired. Under slavery also he was more comfortably clothed and systematically fed than he had ever been in his native country. It was a commercial asset to the master, who was interested in the best possible returns from his slaves, to thus wholesomely care for them. Protection from inclemency of weather and the possibility of disease were better ordered in their behalf than ever before, and all the arts of civil life were immediately opened to them under practiced hands. All this however existed only under the most favorable phases of slavery; as commercialism

found it more and more profitable the slaves were often sacrificed to greed, inhuman and vicious practices arose, and the very existence of the race became menaced.

When slavery was abolished and the negroes became freemen they were compelled to struggle for their existence on their own initiative in competition with the white man in his native country, and in these adverse circumstances new difficulties arose for them. It was only natural for them to tend to fall back into the crude, unsanitary forms of living which were native to them and which were even more deleterious in effects because of strange and unaccustomed surroundings. The vices of civilization have also taken on emphatic forms among them, as is always the case with more primitive peoples, and are correspondingly more deadly. Being thus left to their own instincts, traditions, and ignorance, they have been the pathetic subjects of their own follies as well as the prey for the cunning and craft of their wily white brother. Having been dependents they suddenly became independent and must make their way. In this connection we need also to observe the negro's disadvantage in the competitive struggle with the superior race. Only in the most menial service has he anything like an even chance with the white man, and even this is an apparently diminishing one.

That the negroes are capable, in their present state, of a high degree of education, culture and civilization, is already demonstrated; but that they have constitutionally weakened is not easy to show, for the reason that we have little or no comparative data from which to estimate. One thing is certain, namely, that the negroes have a much greater rate of mortality than the white people, and this must result in a diminishing proportion of black population. It is very significant that this proportion of negro population has constantly diminished decade by decade.

Vital statistics are very unsatisfactory, as a rule, because of the impossibility of obtaining accurate returns of data for calculation. Results can be only comparative and approximate, but so far as they go they are the best means of determining the social drift. From the Census of 1900 it may be seen that the increase

of population in the United States for the previous twenty years had been: negroes 34.2 per cent.; whites 53.9 per cent. In the Census of 1910 the reported increase of population for the preceding ten years was: negroes 11.2 per cent.; whites 22.3 per cent. This would indicate that the proportionate increase of the white race is practically *twice* that of the negro race.

The increase of population in the southern states, where the negro population is greatest, in the twenty years preceding 1900, was: negroes 33.1 per cent.; whites 56.5 per cent. In the Census of 1910, the increase of population for the preceding ten years was: negroes 10.4; whites 24.3 per cent. This would show that the white population in these states increased proportionately about two and one-third times as much as the negro population, whereas in the twenty years preceding 1900 the per cent. of increase of the whites had been only about seven-tenths greater than that of the negroes.

Vital statistics are very defective, especially in affording information in relation to the colored race, because of the small proportion of this population found in the registration area, that is, where records of births, deaths, etc., are kept. In 1900 this area included somewhat less than one half of the total population of the United States, and from it the Census Bureau received returns only for deaths. Furthermore only 13.4 per cent. of the negro population was in the registration area. But this registration has been extended until in 1910 the negro population included within the area was 19.7 per cent., and in 1915 it was increased to 30.4 per cent. Calculating the death-rate by the number of deaths occurring in a year to each 1,000 persons living in the middle of that year, we reach the result that the death-rate of the non-Caucasians in 1890 was 34.4, and in 1900 it was 34.2; of the whites, in 1890 it was 19.5, and in 1900, 17.4. In 1910 the death-rate of the negro race was 25.5, and of the white race 14.6; of the other races no rate is given. These figures indicate that there has been a decline in the death-rate of each race in recent years, but that the decline has been less rapid among the negroes than among the whites, and that the death rate of the negroes at the present time lacks but two-tenths of being double that of the white race.

Confining our consideration to the southern states, where the white population increased in the last ten years about two and one-third times faster than the negro population, and where the death-rate is nearly twice as great among the negroes as among the whites, we reach the significant conclusion that the relative proportion of negroes to the total population is becoming ever less and less in the succeeding years.

## II. ILLICIT AMALGAMATION

Marriages between the blacks and whites are very rare. But ever since the negroes were first brought to this country as slaves there has been a constant illicit amalgamation of the races. So extensive and widespread has this been that at the present time the proportion of full-blood negroes in the United States is impossible to determine. This illicit amalgamation of the races has been confined almost wholly to the lower and more vicious classes. But nature is no respecter of persons. In the statistics of the matter, any one having the slightest admixture of black blood in him is classed as negro: blacks are all those having three-fourths black blood; mulatto, those having from three-eighths to five-eighths black blood; quadroon, those having one-fourth black blood; and octaroon, those having one-eighth or any trace of black blood.

In proportion to the total population, the mulattos or mixed bloods have steadily increased from decade to decade. In 1850 the total mixed bloods or mulatto population in the United States, in proportion to the negro, was 11.2 per cent.; in 1870 it was 12 per cent.; in 1890 it was 15.2 per cent.; and in 1910 it was 20.9 per cent. This ranges from 45.9 per cent. in Maine, where negroes are only two per cent. of the total population, to 16.1 per cent. in South Carolina, where negroes are 55.2 per cent. of the total population.

The tendency of this amalgamation is gradually to raise the percentage of white blood in the black race. The effect of this would seem to be that, since the longevity or hardiness of the white race has appeared to be evident, the white blood would predominate more and more among the negroes and the black blood become pro-

portionately submerged. This would mean that those negroes having a mixture of white blood, other things being equal, would have a hardiness, longevity and fitness for the struggle for existence superior to the pure-blood negro. With the present proportion of mulatto to full-blood negroes this survival of the lighter mixed-bloods over their blacker fellows can not be clearly discerned, if at all it may be determined; but that this general law of nature is working out its inevitable ends seems without doubt.

Furthermore the social condition, that is, the opportunity for livelihood and wholesome existence, would also be easier for the mulattos. The lighter colored of the race would doubtless more readily find favorable employment and thereby surer protection and means of self-preservation in the severe struggle of life which must eliminate many. Both biological and sociological laws thus tend to blend out the darker shades and substitute the lighter shades of negroes as the ages go by.

There are many who think that the amalgamation of the races is a menace to both the black and white people. But such menace, if it exist, is apparently sociological and political more than biological. It is without doubt true that amalgamation is destined to bring more complicated social relations into operation. It is calculated to intensify race bitterness, for the time being at least; but in the deeper wisdom of the laws of nature it may indeed be the final solution of this perplexing problem, which to our human thinking seems almost insoluble. The social difficulty may be intensified by the fact that the man with only one-eighth negro blood will not so readily submit to racial inequality or the slights and perhaps injustices inflicted upon him by the white race; whereas the blacker negro may, with a sort of instinct, recognize the superiority of the white man and be willing to freely render due deference thereto. A relation of servility will not be easy for a comparatively white negro to men who perhaps have little lighter skin than himself. The white race, however, is disposed to make the same demands of all who have any negro blood whatsoever. Hence more social friction is liable to arise from the amalgamating process than from any other. But for problems of this character there is only

one course that leads to solution, namely, a deeper sense of humanity, justice and sweet reasonableness on the part of both races. Righteousness and benevolence, here as everywhere, are the only panacea.

Illicit amalgamation of the races is condemned by all right thinking men. But the hated process goes on in spite of all protest. Accordingly we have to face the question and seek to understand the goal to which this factor is bearing us. If we can discern the end at all, it seems that nature's law as operative among us is bent upon a gradual elimination of color demarcation; its method, apparently, is to gradually dissipate the darker shades and substitute the lighter in human beings. This process, however, is dilatory, and only the ages to come can determine the final result. We are in a current which carries us forward in spite of ourselves; it only remains for us to direct the forces about us for the greatest possible good to all.

### III. NATURAL SELECTION

By the principle of natural selection in this relation we mean the disposition of the negro race to naturally propagate along lines that tend to a lightening of their color. The superiority of the white race has been enforced upon the consciousness of the black race for generations, and from every angle of his experience. By the white man he was fed and led, corrected and directed; from him came the issues of life and death. The tradition of the black man, therefore, makes him look up to the white man somewhat as he does to his God, or at least as a child does to its father. Students of the subject tell us that the negro's dream of heaven is that it is a place where he himself will be white. He has come to think that all his griefs and burdens are because he is black, and that they will cease when he becomes white in the hereafter. There is no mistaking that there is some such ruling passion, a dumb striving of the race for this hoped-for heaven, and that it is a stronger impelling motive than we are accustomed to think. A southern lady said to her old servant, who was particularly tidy in her person: "Never mind, aunty, when you get to heaven you'll be as white as any of us." In transports of rapture at the thought of its realization, she answered: "Gawd bress de lips dat says so."

It is reasonable, then, to suppose that this passionate longing to be delivered from what they have thought to be the curse of their color would make the negroes tend to grasp at the slightest straw which might help to bring that desired good to present realization. The tendency, therefore, would seem to be natural for the lighter colored among them to mate with the lighter; and thus more and more there would be the tendency to preserve the strain of white blood in the race, and even the lighter strain of the negro blood. There would be a disposition of the whiter of the mulattos and mixed-bloods to select and mate with the lighter of their kind. This also would tend to gradually eliminate the blacker of the race. Of course circumstances will make all kinds of exceptions to this rule, but the principle would seem to hold nevertheless in a large way. It has even been suggested now and again that some negro women prefer to bear children of white men rather than of black. Of this there can be no confirmation. But if it be so, it would only exemplify the principle of natural selection and the general longing that their offspring might be whiter than themselves—a step in bringing to pass their desire of becoming white at last.

It is evident that this principle of natural selection can not result in any rapid transformation of the negro race; but in the ages to come it would seem to be one of the most potent factors working for the ultimate outcome. The subtle forces of nature take up the unnoticed and imperceptible factors of life into its processes and in the end bring about the most astonishing results, silently and invisibly. That such forces of evolution are operative here as everywhere can not be denied, and the tendency seems to be evident that by a process of natural selection the darker of the negro race will gradually be more and more submerged and the lighter of the race preserved. Consequently the developing movement of the negro race seems to be in the direction of a blending to ever lighter and lighter shades.

This principle of natural selection is more effective in its results than we have been accustomed to think. We are perhaps accustomed to notice the exceptions to the rule rather than the operation of the principle itself. But the principle is as dominant and potent

in this sphere of operation as in any other realm of nature, and it is certain that the results will be even more pronounced because of the ruling passion which controls it. Combining, then, the results of natural selection with those of illicit amalgamation and the higher rate of mortality of the negro race, the outcome seems to be conclusive that the whiter element must survive the blacker in the struggle for existence, and that the negro race will tend to become lighter as the ages go by.

#### IV. ENVIRONMENT

There can be no doubt that the environment, that is, climatic condition, food products, and general geographic conditions, along with hereditary tendencies, traditions and customs, account for the articulate peculiarities of the various races. Featural characteristics and physiological differentiations may best be accounted for by heredity and a certain racial inertia. But when we ask for the cause of the different colors in the various races, the answer is not so evident. The old assumption that some peculiar characteristics of the several sons of Noah accounts for the differences of race and color in their descendants is to be regarded as wholly mythologic. The only scientific explanation must be found in the influence of the environment on human nature. The soil conditions which determine food products are doubtless a factor, but it is probable that zone and general climatic, geographic and vital conditions are the more dominant factors so far as color is concerned. Animals of the polar regions become white in adjustment to their snowy surroundings; and the northern peoples, as a rule, are whiter than those of more southern zones, where a darker shading is perceptible as we approach the equator.

Environmental and climatic conditions have been working toward the present color results throughout the thousands of years of human history. The reason that America produced a red or bronze race, and Africa a black race, and Asia a brown or yellow race, must surely be found in the peculiarity of each of these continents, rather than in any original innate color of the respective natives. What these peculiar conditions are is for science to deter-

mine. We know that the natives of equatorial Africa are black, and even the peoples of extreme southern Europe tend distinctly to a swarthy complexion, as the Spaniard, the Italian and Greek. Experience also demonstrates that if the white man dwells in Africa continuously for many years he tends to take on a decidedly dark color. It is, therefore, easy to understand what must have been the result in the case of the natives who have been there as a race throughout the centuries. It would seem to be properly scientific to conclude that the African negro is black because of the peculiar climatic and other environment in its age-long effect.

If the foregoing conclusion be correct, then the inevitable prediction must be that the tendency of the African negro in America will be to become lighter in color, as time goes by, while the whites, contrarily, will tend to become a shade darker. Whether the negroes have actually become lighter in color by means of climatic conditions in their short history in this country is problematical, but there are some evidences to that effect. At least if color be a matter of environmental effect, then it is but natural to expect that the tendency would be to find the negro becoming lighter in America, and that in time he might be expected to become not perceptibly darker than the natives of the Philippine Islands or the Spaniards of Cuba. Such a final result, to be sure, could be expected only as the gradual evolution of the centuries, but in view of the processes operative it seems not too much to expect in the end.

From an investigation of the forces at work, therefore, the indications seem to be that: because of the far lower rate of propagation and much greater rate of mortality among the negroes as compared with the whites, their relative proportion to the total population of the United States is becoming ever less; because of the constant process of illicit amalgamation, there is a continual increased proportion of white blood infused into the black race, which tends to diminish the sharpness of color distinction; because of the process of natural selection by which the lighter colored of the black race tend to survive, the darker colored tend to be finally eliminated; and because of the American climatic and environmental conditions, the tendency is for this to gradually lighten the color of the black

race. All these forces, so far as we can discern, seem to be working together for the blending out of the extreme color of the negro race in America. In other words, nature seems to be determined to eliminate the extremes of color demarcation among us. "The mills of the gods grind slow," and such results are not to be wrought out in a generation, but so far as we may judge the distant outcome seems to be rather surely indicated. And if such should be the case, it would evidently be the solution of many a racial difficulty in the coming history of our civilization. Deeper than all our philosophy and statesmanship are the great laws of human life which take up even the neglected threads, unnoticed by us, and weave out of them a web of destiny whose designs and colorings transcend our knowledge, but which we believe must be wise and beneficent.

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